



**U.S. Department of Justice**

*United States Attorney  
District of New Hampshire*

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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release  
May 13, 2003**

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**DEA "CROSS-BORDER INITIATIVE" TASK FORCE**

**TWO MASSACHUSETTS MEN SENTENCED ON FEDERAL  
COCAINE DISTRIBUTION CONSPIRACY CHARGES**

**Re: United States v. Miguel Mercado and Herman Wiitala**

**CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE:** United States Attorney Tom Colantuono and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Resident Agent in Charge Mark Trouville announced that Miguel MERCADO, DOB 11/25/72 of Lawrence, Massachusetts, and Herman WIITALA, DOB 10/9/78 of Pepperell, Massachusetts were sentenced on May 13, 2003 on federal cocaine conspiracy charges.

On September 4, 2002, Mercado and Wiitala were arrested in Pepperell, Massachusetts and Salem, New Hampshire, respectively, after an undercover operation by the Drug Enforcement Administration revealed that they had conspired to distribute cocaine in Northern Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire. On January 31, 2003, both men entered guilty pleas, to charges alleging that they conspired to distribute large quantities of cocaine in New Hampshire during the summer and fall of 2002.

U.S. District Judge Steven J. McAuliffe sentenced both Wiitala and Mercado to 104 months imprisonment. Judge McAuliffe also imposed a five-year period of supervised release following each defendant's sentence, during which their behavior will be monitored by the U.S. Department of Probation.

U.S. Attorney Colantuono stated, "This case demonstrates our office's commitment to aggressively prosecuting drug traffickers, and especially those who transport drugs into New Hampshire's southern tier over the Massachusetts border. This case is a prime example of the effectiveness of DEA's Cross Border Initiative (CBI). I will continue to commit Assistant U.S. Attorneys from my office to prosecute cases investigated by CBI."

The conviction resulted from an investigation conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration's Cross Border Initiative (CBI), a Task Force based in Lowell, Massachusetts made up of federal agents from the DEA, FBI, IRS, and local police departments from Northern Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire including the Salem, New Hampshire Police Department. The CBI's primary focus is drug trafficking over the Massachusetts-New Hampshire border. The prosecution was handled by Assistant United States Attorney Joseph N. Laplante, the Lead Attorney for the District of New Hampshire in the New England Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force ("New England OCDEF").